

**Peer-reviewed academic journal**

**Innovative Issues and Approaches in  
Social Sciences**

**IIASS – VOL. 10, NO. 2, MAY 2017**

## **Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences**

IIASS is a double blind peer review academic journal published 3 times yearly (January, May, September) covering different social sciences: political science, sociology, economy, public administration, law, management, communication science, psychology and education.

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IIASS has started as a Sldip – Slovenian Association for Innovative Political Science journal and is now being published in the name of CEOs d.o.o. by Založba Vega (publishing house).

### **Typeset**

This journal was typeset in 11 pt. Arial, Italic, Bold, and Bold Italic; the headlines were typeset in 14 pt. Arial, Bold

### **Abstracting and Indexing services**

COBISS, International Political Science Abstracts, CSA Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, CSA Sociological Abstracts, PAIS International, DOAJ.

### **Publication Data:**

CEOs d.o.o.

Innovative issues and approaches in social sciences

ISSN 1855-0541

**Additional information:** [www.iiass.com](http://www.iiass.com)

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW OF A LATE-MODERN INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTITY

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### **Abstract**

The passage into a late modern society means the exclusion of a person from his traditional relations, religious systems and social relationships. To an individual the exposure to risks, which were unknown to the traditional pre-modern society, represent vulnerability, especially regarding interpersonal relationships and the possibility of one's self-modernization. We start from the assumption that phenomena as riskiness, uncertainty, anxiety, unhappiness and disconnectedness are immanent to risk society and that the modern structure of society creates individuals with an unclear and unstable identity. This manifests itself in a form of numerous emotional distresses and thus consequently can make personal distresses a sociological, aggregate phenomenon as well as individual mental health problem.

**Keywords:** late-modern, identity, individualization, ontological safety, mental health

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.12959/issn.1855-0541.IIASS-2017-no2-art02>

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## **Introduction**

The theoreticians define the condition of late-modern society<sup>3</sup> based on tension among various ambivalences: individuality and plurality, locality and globality, production and reproduction, virtual and actual reality, reality and hyper-reality, a subject positioned as a center and one removed from the center position. The new conditions in the social reality of late-modernism are reflected in new interpersonal relations, new fears and risks, tension between local and global, and new relationships within the consumerist culture. We define the late-modern period as a period of pluralized society and new forms of social relations, a period of a fragmented and individualized person, a period of globalized consumerism, many choices and new risks (Bauman, 2002, 2007; Beck, 2001, 2003; Giddens, 1991, 2000).

According to Beck the late-modern society is a high-risk society, which introduces new forms of risks and danger and it is built on the reflection of the previous situation (Beck, 2001: 11–19). Modern institutions are becoming globalized and the daily life distanciate itself from traditions and usages that were always present in previous periods. The late-modernism affects absolutely all spheres of social life, and carries risks particularly on the level of the individual and interpersonal relationships.

Giddens (1991) perceives the changes of the radicalized or reflexive modernism as well, however his concept of late modernism assumes a greater continuity with modernism as Beck's concept of risk society. Giddens' general assumption is that it is possible to consciously manage modern societies to a certain extent, while Beck accents the unintentional side effects as the driving force of progress.

Giddens' study of modernization places Beck's thesis in a socio-psychological and sociological context. On the subject of living in a "risk society", Giddens believes that it is merely a calculative approach to whether positive or negative open possibilities, choices and acts, with which we are constantly confronted as individuals or groups in modern social situations (ibid: 15). According to Giddens' (2001) structuration theory, the society and the individual have a two-

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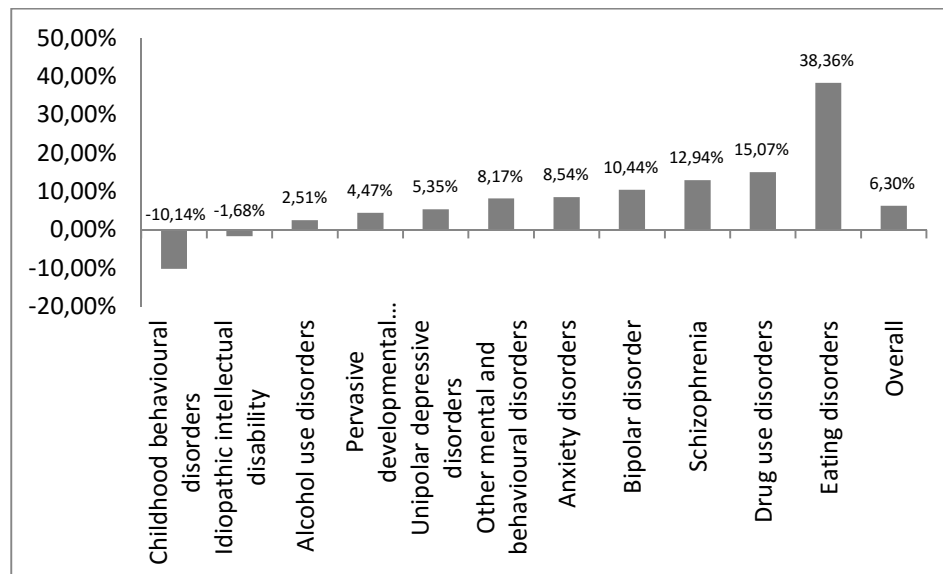
<sup>3</sup> The English sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) and some other critics and theoreticians name the modern social condition, the condition of the 21st century, a high or late modernism and not postmodernism. They believe that the prefix post is misleading because (in linguistic sense) indicates something that comes after, that substitutes the previous condition. The use of the concept of late modernism was justified as being more of a progress of the characteristics of modernism and not its replacement. Despite acknowledging some characteristics of postmodernism, Giddens believes that we have not yet reached it and that modernism is still developing.

way effect. An individual's actions and their way of developing create a structure, which in turn affects the individual and enables him to function. So the individual with his actions affects and changes the society, and in the meanwhile changes himself also in accordance with the reactions of society. All big changes that take place in a society and bring new, unknown or less expressed risks, demand a new evaluation of social life.

The analysis of the cultural situation in the late modernism shows the increase of identity incertitude, disorientation, loss of the center and depth and the emphasizing of short duration, fluidity and variability (Bahovec, 2005: 140). Unlike the constant investment in the technological and economic progress of western society, the culture of social relationships remains unchanged. Furthermore, with the society's remarkable scientific and economic progress we still witness numerous destructive phenomena, which present the individual more and more vulnerable on a personal, relational and social status level.

The typical destructive phenomena of modernism and late modernism are: occurrence and increase of various chemical and nonchemical types of addiction, the increase of mental health problems, the increase of violent behaviour, including suicides and murders, relationship and family problems. It is interesting how these mental health problems increased in 2000-2012 period according to World health organization data for European region.

Figure 1: Mental and behavioural disorders as years lost to disability increase from 2000 to 2012



Source: WHO 2012 data (own analyses)

WHO data shows us substantial increase in years lost due to mental health problems (only childhood behaviour disorders and idiopathic intellectual disability decreased). Overall increase in years lost due to mental health problems increased 6,30 % from 2000 to 2012.

### **Individualization and formation of relationships in late modern society**

The challenges of modern society come mostly from individualization<sup>4</sup> and pluralism, which means a multitude of possible choices and by that decisions that an individual has to face nowadays. Beck believes that by creating social networks and also being active in other fields a

<sup>4</sup> Beck (2001) uses the concept of individualization for naming the processes of pre-structuring and dynamization of life styles in western society. He understands individualization as “eradicating”/ “liberating” (disembedding) from the original frame of an everyday life and daily social relationships (ibid). The individualization represents social processes characterized by melting of life forms that are regulated and standardized in advance, for example class affiliation, gender roles, nuclear family, etc. and by disintegration of organized biographies and life orientations (Ule and Kuhar, 2003: 22).

man becomes a being of choices<sup>5</sup>, “a being of possibilities”, *homo options* (Beck, 1998). The selectiveness brings an individual to make decisions followed by risks<sup>6</sup> that he cannot anticipate and control entirely. That is why individualization of an individual means more conflicts, breaks and risks, he cannot be sure if he made a right decision, but at the same time the democratization of a person's individualization enables more choices and freedom (Beck - Gernsheim in Beck, Beck - Gernsheim, 2006: 90; Beck, 2002).

The partiality of the society offers to an individual a multitude of choices, numerous roles and at the same time the loss of unified social frame. In opposition to the predictable answers of a traditional social environment, the future of late modernism enables numerous different alternatives, among which an individual chooses himself (Giddens, 1991: 73). Therefore, his choice is a constant search for balance between possibility and risk (ibid).

According to Beck the process of individualization in the flexible postmodern society or in the society of “second modernism”<sup>7</sup> appears more and more as individual's “liberation” from the forces of everyday life's leading social frames; as the loss of traditional pillars and the increase and individualization of social risks and inequality connected to it; as the submission and addiction to social institutions, etc. (Beck, 1992).

Primary, individualization concerns three dimensions: the dimension of liberating individuals from historically predefined social forms, from traditional relationships of domination and supplying ; the dimension of growing up, which means the loss of traditional certainty and transparency, how to do something, the loss of trust in the leading social norms, and the dimension of control or reintegration and of relationships

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<sup>5</sup> Sande defines the choice of a modern man as choice between life, death, physicality, identity, religion, marriage, parenting, mobile phones, drugs, etc. (Sande, 2004: 12).

<sup>6</sup> The systematic theoretician Niklas Luhmann distinguishes between the concepts of risk and danger, wherein “with distinguishing he supposes that there is an uncertainty linked to the future damage. We can explain the possible damage as a consequence of decision-making, so we attribute the damage to it. In this case we talk about risk, namely about the risk of decision-making. We can explain the possible damage as something caused by external factors and so we attribute it to the environment. In this case we talk about danger.” (Luhmann, 1997: 22)

<sup>7</sup> The «second modernism» is a term introduced into the social theory by Beck (1994) to replace the concept of postmodernism. According to Beck, the classic modernism is only part modern because it did not carry out the modernization processes.

among people, who form them according to their personal interests, will and especially life styles (ibid).

Bauman understands the issue of individualization as “ transformation of ‘identity’ from ‘endowment’ to ‘task’ and as assigning the agents to the responsibility for performing these tasks and the consequences (also side effects) of their operations.” (Bauman, 2002: 42) But he also points out that now and once – on the fluent<sup>8</sup> and simple and the solid and difficult level of modernism – individualization is a destiny, not a choice. It is not possible to avoid individualization and refuse to collaborate in the game of individualization. The subject’s freedom and the responsibility for the construction of its own identity structure have their price – the loss of the feeling of safety (ibid: 45).

Giddens (1990, 1991) also stresses the importance of individualization, which he perceives as the construction of identity through a coherent narration of a person’s life as one of the basis of modern society. According to Giddens there is no identity in the behaviour or in the reactions of other people: “Identity is not a distinguishing characteristic nor a collection of characteristics owned by an individual. It’s oneself, reflexively comprehended by a person in the terms of his or her biography.” (Giddens, 1991: 53)

An optional or fiddled, reflexive or do-it-yourself biography, at the same time always a risky biography (Beck, 1992) dictates decisions and choices that have responsibility as a consequence. An individual’s understanding of the sense of his own actions enables him to see that he is responsible for his actions. “And that is the essence of personal identity: a subjective control over the actions, for which we take an objective responsibility.” (Berger in Luckmann, 1999: 19)

According to Beck, individualization is an institutionalized individualism, which means that the basic human rights and responsibilities redirect more and more from groups and localities to individuals. That represents a complete turn in the ways of life, thinking, individual’s identity and subjective structures, their interpersonal relationships and social relations; a turn from domination of class, gender, cultural identities defined beforehand to increasingly plural, individually determined, temporary and relationally oriented life style (Ule, 2000: 51–52).

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<sup>8</sup> Bauman uses the concept of »fluid modernism« as a metaphor for the present level of the modern period. According to Bauman the present is changing, that is why it retains its form with difficulty.



Individualization reduces the length and strength of interpersonal connections, strong communities, and the individual's obligation to those connections and communities (Dahrendorf in Ule, 1994: 23). Therefore it is not only the biography that is at risk, but also an individual's social decisions. Thus, giving meaning to life depends on an individual's decisions, and therefore it cannot be considered as a victim of individualization, as part of a collective destiny, but as the creator of his own destiny. Individualization implies the subject's tendency to take his destiny in his own hands.

Encouraging an individual to pursue only his own interests and satisfactions, and the interests and satisfactions of others only to the extent as they concern his own, causes shallowness and fragility in interpersonal relationships. There is no reciprocity or solidarity; there is only the prospect of an individual to acquire it, for it is an urgent psychological need, but the individual would not give it. The influence of individualization on interpersonal relationships results in the loss of continuity, durability, confidentiality, dedication and reliability in interpersonal relationships. The modern individual creates fragile and hollow interpersonal relationships, which are without the basic sense of security and belonging and thus, cannot give him the possibility to establish a strong identity.

The occurrence of unconnected and disjointed relationships in society, oversaturation and weakening of social ties, lead to the emerging of an un-centered subject, who no longer has solid identity foundations (Gergen, 1991). Being a subject of late modernity means to constantly be the subject of self-reflection, self-control and to have an identity, that is a difficult project to achieve. The modern individual no longer lives a solid, continuous and stable story. His "patchwork self-image"<sup>9</sup> can be composed of completely unconnected, separate and temporary life stories. The possibility of an independent and the necessity of a constant choice making and moreover the creating one's own identity which the individual cannot shape into a logical image, manifest themselves in a form of deviation in the individual's life<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The modern type of identity is defined by terms as »patchwork identity«, »jungle of the self« (Beck) and »bricolage identity« (Lash). We translated the latter as »skrapana identiteta«.

<sup>10</sup> The inability to create logical identity is manifested as embitterment, depression, anxiety, addiction, eating disorders, hatred towards oneself or the world, violence against oneself or others, the final form of ripping one's self-image is suicide (Kobal Grum, 2003: 183–184).

An individual's self-awareness and perception, reflection of others, create late-modern identities. The identity in the modern society reconstructs and redefines itself. The disappearing of the personal centered oneself leads to a constant search of one's own identity and the formation of partial identities that compared to traditional identities are more variable, transitional and less overloaded .

The individual of the late modernism has the possibility to form his identity, defined as a social construct, which originates in the society and with its help and also changes according to it. The self becomes the center of actions in the late modernism, the society becomes the instrument which enables the individual to form his individual life (Beck in Beck, Beck - Gernsheim, 2006: 50). "Individualization in this sense means that the biography of people liberates itself from anticipated fixations, becomes open, dependent on decisions and it is laid in the hands of each individual as a duty." (Beck, 2001: 197) So, the self becomes a reflexive project, whose priority is self-actualization, the realization of the assumption of existential philosophy ("who am I, what am I and where I'm going").

Beck believes that social agents have to decide about their privacy, therefore to form reflexively their biographies. In his opinion, elective biographies are a reflection of an individual's autonomic action and "a response to the social situations outside privacy" (Beck v Giddens, 2000: 213).

With the thesis that "the changes in the private aspects of a personal life are directly linked to larger social situations or that the reflexivity of modernity expands also to the essence of self" (Giddens, 2000: 209), Giddens introduces the concept of the reflexive self-project. It consists of "coherent, but always revised biographic stories, it takes place in a context of various choices, which filtrates through abstract systems." (ibid) Identities were supplanted by unified, sovereign selves. So, according to Weeks, identity has become a process and not something given, which "offers us the choice of staying, existing before the truth about us." (Weeks, 1995: 31)

The meaning and the influence of self-evidence that dictated the course of the individual's choice get lost. And so the prescribed life forms, a person creates his own biography according to his desires, ambitions, in which case he exposes himself to risks, but he is free, creative and could be completely innovative.

The self of a late-modern subject is more autonomous, fluid, plural and open to changes. In the late modernism the self becomes a reflexive project and the individual's identity a reflexive (conscious) project of a self that leads a person to the original core of a personal and social truth (Giddens, 1991: 53). The individual identity is not determined and interpreted through tradition anymore that is why Giddens (1991: 33) believe that it is necessary to include self-reflexivity of the personality and life situations into individualization.

We have to understand the subject's self-realization as a "balance between a possibility and a risk" (Giddens, 1991: 73). The change in the perception of risk in the modern society changed with the loss of the known, the essential. On a theoretic level it is possible to connect the loss of balance and the basic confidence in our own abilities and the rightness of our choices to the concept of identity crisis and the loss of ontological security (ibid: 39) that the late-modern theoreticians install into the discussion about complex situations of late-modern societies. A person's life liberate itself from external control and constraints, by that it loses its external support, the sense of security and its deepest identity (Beck - Gernsheim in Beck, Beck - Gernsheim, 2006: 57). The concepts and perceptions of modernism are subdued to doubts and scepticism; they are not comprehended anymore as something natural and non-questionable, but as constructs created by an individual alone (Bernardes, 1997: 39). When Giddens talks about the aspiration to *clear relationships*, basically dependent on contentment and repayments that belong with these relationships and not on external contentment and repayments, he believes that the relationships become an elementary necessity, in the socio-psychological sense of clear relationships and relations, for the reflexive self-project (Giddens, 2000).

Therefore firstly it is necessary to place the construction of identity and social reality in the context of two levels: the self and inter-subjective exchanges.

### **Intersubjectivity of construction of the real world**

The theory of symbolic interactionism, regarding the cognitive representation of the social world in a person corresponds to a concept of “generalized other”. According to Mead, the “generalized others”, which enable a person’s self-perception in a social environment, are values, ethical rules characteristic for a culture where a child socializes (Mead, 1997: 103–167).

An individual is born into an objective social structure, where he is faced with important others that are responsible for his socialization. These important others are imposed to the individual. Their definitions of a person’s situation are presented to him as an objective reality. By that, he is not born just into an objective social structure, but into an objective social world. The important others, who pass this world to him, change it during the mediation. They choose the images according to their own position in the social structure and based on their own life rooted characteristics (Berger and Luckmann, 1988: 123–124).

Mead (1934) believes that not all the people that are part of an individual’s various forms of relationships are equally important for the construction of one’s self-image, but only some of them, the so-called “important others”. Those people have a special place in an individual’s life and are part of his quality world.

The important others are definitely the parents who define the world the child has to internalize. According to Berger and Luckmann (1988), they modify it twice – as members of a culture and through their own life history. Parents co-shape the child’s objective reality with their opinions. The child does not doubt what his important person says; he accepts his opinion as the truth and in time makes it his own (Friebe, 1993: 42–44).

The process of self-respect and self-valuation is connected to the opinion of the “important others”. Numerous authors (Snygg and Combs, 1949; Rogers, 1951, Makarovic and Rek 2014; Rek et. al. 2015) stress the need for a positive self-valuation as a basic human need.

Rogers (1951) asserts that a positive conception of personality or confidence in oneself and others is based on the parents’ unconditional acceptance of their child and that a negative conception of oneself is based on the terms of strictness. A selective praise creates what Rogers calls conditions of worth; it makes the children believe that their parents’ love depends on the possession of determined qualities and on certain behaviour. Instead of a selective praise in Roger’s opinion we should develop more effectively a child’s

positive self-esteem with unconditional acceptance, which means to respect and love the child without valuating his specific qualities.

Merkle (1996) believes that an individual's negative thinking about himself is inured. The internal critic, as he names it, evolves within a person early years of his life. A child learns to look at himself through his parents' eyes and to talk to himself as they used to do. Everyone has an observer inside who controls his behaviour and gives the final judgment. By pointing out his mistakes and his weaknesses he attacks his self-confidence. The internal critic takes advantage of any chance, even an insignificant one, to humiliate the person and does not allow even the slightest possibility to make him feel better (Friebe, 1993: 41). The internal critic is an "important other" who had an important influence on the child. The critic took over the values, ethical rules and the life philosophy, everything the "important others" told him (Merkle, 1996: 40–44).

It is necessary to understand the relation between a man and a social context regarding the socio-psychological interpretation of an individual's behaviour and his actions within the frame of two contradictory approaches: the approach from "downside up" and the approach from "upside down" (Burr, 1995: 97). The first approach presumes that a person is a being concluded in himself, within who evolve private psychological processes that influence fundamentally his reactions. The area of the society represents only an area of various dependent and independent variables that need to be controlled or excluded. But this approach disregards the contradictoriness and the partiality of a person's mental structure and the constant construction of the social world (Ule, 2005: 27–28). The systematic view on a person and the society comprehends the person as socially constructed through the totality of his social relationships, which is why the study of the consequences of social effects on individuals and the use of the approach upside down are necessary. Ule stresses that the social construction is a process which can be as subjective as objective, individual and social. It is a collective context and the source of human actions, its subjective and objective viewpoints (ibid: 28). The systematic conception of the relationship between a person and society and the concept of the social construction of reality besides the social interaction on all four levels of social activity – intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and institutional-social – includes also the levels of the socio-psychological analysis and the explanations.<sup>11</sup> For studying the discussed theme are especially relevant the individual and

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<sup>11</sup> These levels were defined and analyzed by Doise (1986). Beside the individual, interpersonal and situational level, the social interaction takes place also on an institutional/positional and systematic/ideological level.

interpersonal level. Therefore we emphasize the psychological subject and his psychological responses to social influences and psychological mechanisms that are important for his integration in a social interaction.

As the experimental studies shows (Coopersmith, 1967; Gergen, 1977; Meyer, 1983) the indirect feedbacks, given by important people through their behaviour and a general relationship towards the individual, can have a big influence on his self-valuation (Skalar, 1990: 16). The basic model "The reflected appraisal process" (TRAP) (or, according to Cooley and Mead, "the mirror self") is composed of three elements: self-evaluation; the actual evaluation of "important others"; the individual's perceptions of the evaluation of "important others". The theory poses two basic suppositions: that the evaluation of important others influences the reflective evaluation (subjectively interpreted feedbacks) and that the reflected evaluation influences the self-evaluation. The first postulate asserts that to a certain extent people sense correctly what others think about them. The second postulate suggests that an individual internalize these reflective evaluations if they are correct or not. The third postulate originates from the first two and states that the evaluation of "important others" influences directly one's self-evaluation; the effect would be noticeable if the reflective evaluations (the reflection of others' opinions) were not taken into consideration (Felson, 1993). The studies show that there is a correlation among a self-evaluation, the evaluation of "important others" and an individual's perception of the evaluations of "important others".

Schulz (ibid: 138–139) warns us about the consequences of defined experiences that influences the formation of the concept of one's own self. The message about the relationship seems completely personal and could have considerable long-term effect (ibid: 138–139). In the process of primary socialization from the viewpoint of a close social environment, the stereotypes, decisive for an individual regarding his looks and his holistic behaviour which influences the formation of an individual's role and posture, strengthen.

Mead (1997) defines an individual's social self as the segment of personality in which the subject absorbs, internalizes all the social contents he got during the socialization processes. However, the subject do not accept these contents passively, but at least from a defined period on, he processes actively, selects through a personal, operative self the segment of personality which is the operator of self-awareness and his own activity. According to all that, Mead separates two stages of socialization: play and game. The first stage, the play, is the one before the appearance of the personal self, the second stage, the game, is the

one after. This is a period where the subject already thinks about his behaviour and he is autonomous in a sense or at least partly autonomous in taking his decisions, including the choice of the survival strategy.

Goffman (1959) warns us about the individual's »role playing« and »mask wearing« which are the representation of an individual's self-perception. But Buss and Briggs (1984) assert that a social behaviour is frequently the consequence of a compromise between external expectations for keeping the appearance (self-presentation) and a person's individuality (Shaw, 1997: 303).

Sullivan's interpersonal theory also discusses the meaning of the interaction with others for the development of self-image (Sullivan, 1953). In his own way, Sullivan defines the role of "other people" in the development of one's self conception. He attributes the biggest importance to warm interpersonal relationships with important people that give to the individual a sense of security and protection (Ule, 2000: 126). Sullivan defends the theory that all personal growth, all the regress of personality, therapy and the growth of personality originate from our relationships with others.

An individual's personal experience includes the so-called proprioceptive self<sup>12</sup>, which does not exclude the individual from forming his own image. Acquiring messages from others can never be merely a passive expression, a passive reflection of unfamiliar ideas and opinions of other people. Our vision of other people's ideas is necessary and just ours. Through the proprioceptive data we are obtaining an image of ourselves that others generally cannot pass to us and that is why this data is a deep psychological basis of our self and our self-image. All show that the mirror, social data about us somehow clings on this basic proprioceptive self-image (Musek, 1992: 68).

The understanding of the relationship between society and personality represents a peculiar coexistence, co-dependence, for a person co-lives with others and among others. It's in the human nature to construct a

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<sup>12</sup> The studies about social identity prove that people experience their world and define themselves according to their socio-cultural contexts (Asch, 1952; Gurin and Markus, 1988; Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Among the socio-cultural factors that influence the formation of a self-image Oyserman and Markus add the historical, economical and national-regional context; nationality, gender role, creed and social status; family, friends and important others; socially saturated self-image (Oyserman and Markus, 1993: 194).

mental reconstruction of what he believes is real. His findings depend on the experiences acquired during his life, on the desires, needs and intentions he has towards others and himself, for the social environment gains importance through the process of social activity (ibid: 99).

We build our own reality construction based on the received, formed and processed data from the external world. We live in a sort of a “subjectively created and formed world” where we accept others and ourselves, where the external world has a “certain characteristics only in relation with a social community of individual organisms that are in a reciprocal interaction” (ibid).

Norbert Elias<sup>13</sup> (2000, 2001) reveals vaguely self-evident behavioural patterns of an individual’s behaviour in society. In his opinion, the transformation in an individual’s behaviour and long-term social changes occurred through the adjusting of individual outbursts of strong emotions with external constraint and self-constraint of changing the human behaviour and experience, and also partially through the changing of the structure of all human behaviours as such. In Elias’s work, the possibility of a behavioural change presents itself as a *habitus* of self-control. In his work *About the civilization process* he talks about the evolutionary process that man experienced and about the historical changing of the relation between self-constraint and social constraint, when “the self-control apparatus strengthens up against the social constraint and civilization takes over the function of self-control habitus” (Elias, 2001: 432). Elias introduces the concept of *homo clausus* as the perception of an individual, who is a small world to himself and exists as completely independent from the vast world outside himself (Elias, 2000: 42).

According to Berger and Luckmann in the context of conceptualization of intersubjectivity, the reality of every day’s life shows itself as an intersubjective world that the individual constantly shares with others in trough interaction and communication (Berger and Luckmann, 1988: 30). This way, a relationship makes it to the forefront of a person’s experience, because the experience gains a meaning only while in a relationship.

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<sup>13</sup> Notbert Elias’ approach includes various theoretical fields of sociology that are the result of influence of sociologists such as Auguste Comte, Karl Mannheim, Karl Marx, Georg Simmel and Max Weber. Elias’ figurative sociology concentrates on the social processes and researches reciprocal connections or figurations among biology, psychology, sociology and history of the evolutionary process that gave human beings the “ability to learn” (Dunning, 1999:13).



The basic question is how to remain a social subject, to acquire and maintain autonomy against the influences of social structure and other phenomena. On the one hand we have an internal conflict within the subject, a rift between the preserving of one's self, his personality, his identity, and on the other hand, the principles of society and the opinions of "important others". Here we can see the conflict between the desired self-image, "as we want to be" and the normal and self-image, "as we should be." With the disintegration of traditional forms, the modern psychological subject represents a plural and diverse system of self-images, his internal contrast are represented by the discrepancy between the desired and real self-image, which manifests through various destructive forms of behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

### **The loss of ontological safety and the crisis of sense**

The late-modern disunity of living shows the uncertainty of anyone who enters the world of unpredictable situation, ontological emptiness and inflexible patterns and routines. The question of safety has become a permanent concern of late-modernism. It represents the loss of ontological security<sup>15</sup>, especially in the fact that the social world or the meaning of life is no longer objectively given, but the individual has to create his own personal meaning. The so-called un-centered subject becomes central, without a crucial or assigned position that can fit into a social context. Identity crises are frequent where the liberation of personal biography from the objective existential plan has occurred.

Giddens (1992) believes that the ontological safety concerns the basic trust, developed by an individual in his relationship with the world and himself. It is connected to the phenomenological to-be-in-the-world and it is mainly an emotional and not a cognitive phenomenon. In Giddens' opinion, confidence is not connected primarily to risk, but to the feeling of biographical continuity, which are an important part of ontological safety and the cornerstone of the feeling of a stable identity.

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<sup>14</sup> Lamovec has identified the primal cause for mental distress in an environment full of pressure and incomprehension, because the individual internalizes the environmental pressures and in doing so he experiences frustrations that turn into a sort of violence. She believes that suicides (as an extreme form), like other mental health problems, are just a symptom of violence that exists in society and does not originates from the individual, but from his confrontation with the world (Lamovec, 1999: 77).

<sup>15</sup> Giddens (2000) introduces the concept of ontological safety, i.e. the confidence that most people have in the continuity of the personal identity and the firmness of the social and material environment activity. The feeling that we can rely on people and things has a crucial importance in the narration of confidence and it is based on the feeling of ontological safety, which is wavering in the view of the risk society.

The new social condition expects from the individual active life choices and other daily activities. Individualization enables alternative life courses, but also claims an individual's active engagement in formatting his personal biography (Beck and Beck - Gernsheim, 1996: 817).

Along with individualization and pluralisation appears the co-called TINA syndrome – “there-is-no-alternative” – that orients the individual's activity inwards, towards himself. Because of the numb relationships between the individual and the structure it /focuses on the individual. Beck names today's society as a “highly individual society: create your own purpose” (ibid: 834). The bonds between the structure and the individual become paralytic and the individual's choicer more and more autonomous. Berger and Luckmann denote modern pluralism as the crucial factor that gives origin to purpose crises in society and in an individual's life. According to them, the consequences of modern pluralism show themselves in the relativisation of value systems and explanations that leads to the disorientation of an individual and of whole groups. “Anomie” and “alienation” are two categories that indicate distress of a person who has to cope with the modern world (Berger and Luckmann, 1999: 37). The authors conclude that in circumstances of individualism and pluralism is hard for individuals to find the self-evident life orientation.. They believe that modern pluralism leads to a great relativisation of values system and “undermines this self-evident behaviour. The world, society, life, and identity are becoming more and more questionable.” (ibid: 39)

Fromm explains how negative influences of liberalism and individualism, based on the human needs, reflects on a personal self. He specifies which needs are existential and which needs are artificially created, and thus form the so-called individual's market character (Fromm, 2004: 133–134). Fromm tackles social relationship critics related to today's capitalist-consumerist society, through the analysis of a pair of concepts: to have and to be. He sees these two concepts as diametrically opposite ways of life, as two different orientations of the human behaviour and society. During the search/while searching for real reasons for the orientation towards acquisition and possession, Fromm ponders about the orientation towards the essence of being, as the pylon of a new and more satisfying society. However in its orientation towards the essence of being it is not about a new life dimension, that man has yet to discover, but it is about a person's genuine nature that he has once lived, but lost (Babič, 2005: 81). Here it is possible to recognize/identify the core of the entire Fromm's philosophy, which is based on the concept of separation: the person is separated from nature, his own true essence, fellow people, and his creativity (ibid).

In the concept of separation lies the source of the human discontent, Fromm found the causes for people's various behaviours in a person's tragic disunity, oriented towards having. The humanism of Fromm's philosophy orientates the individual towards the essence of being, that "can appear as long as we lower the orientation towards having, which is not being – that is, when we cease searching for security and identity as to cling to that what we possess, on our self and our belongings." (Fromm, 2004: 83–84)

The human structure requires a created, constructed model of the world that can help him interpret the events within the world. Our subjectively reshaped world is based on cognitive processes, on receiving and processing data that we acquire from the environment and represent the basis of the world we live in.

A person's individual world is created. This world is just a "perception of something" and it "exists only if he focuses his attention towards the object or the objective" (Berger and Luckmann, 1999: 12). "The purpose is formed in the human consciousness; in a person's consciousness which individualized itself in a certain body and through social processes grew into a person". (ibid) With the phenomenological definition of the consciousness, the authors place the person as the creator of his own world and as the co-creator of social reality that realizes the imposed objective with his actions. They define the characteristics of the social construction of reality as the product of human activity and reciprocal relationships with the intertwining of the individual and social world.

### **Conclusion**

According to anthropological stance, we, as people, need each other in order to meet our needs and desires. The entire human being is placed in a concrete biophysical, psychological and social endowment. Roger's definition of a relationship enables the individual to "fully function" (Evans, 1975). This kind of relationship is qualitative; the individual is understood/seen as a person, with the possibility of personal growth – self-actualization, which is an authentic characteristic of the human organism (ibid).

The assumption that perception and consciousness are constructions and not registrations of the "external" world means that the human perception changes according to the changing of the nature of the constructional process (Ornstein, 1973). A person's freedom lies in the making of his own conscious choices among various possibilities within the concrete situations, endowments and restrictions. The possibility of choosing and deciding for himself enables a renewed evaluation of the

individual's personal freedom – that is why we see the existing “risk society” merely as a framework within which “a person is the one who creates the reality and thus himself by doing so” (Berger and Luckmann, 1988: 169). The belief of humanistic-existential philosophy dictates that human behaviour is not controlled by external events, but it is motivated exclusively by forces originating from himself (Glasser, 1998). Blaming an “external factor” for a person's discontent comes from the general belief that his behaviour is merely a reaction to external stimuli and that his “feeling is caused by other people and events” (ibid: 3), while he has no possibility to decide otherwise.

Liberating fundamental social forms of industrial society – class, family and gender roles (Beck, 2001: 105–106) – increases choice possibilities and enables the individual's self-actualization. Undoubtedly, an important consequence of individualization is the post-modern individual's constant search for identity (Cova, 1999: 72), however the individual's freedom and his possibility to actualize himself lies in the constant search for the meaning of his life. This gives him more possibilities to actualize himself than “within a fixed social and cultural form of community and family that created the subject's' identity from the outside, and imposed the individual a stable status position in a determined space and time. These persons were not individuals in the modern sense of the word; their personality was based on the collective meaning of the identity, their will was directed in accordance with traditional and untouchable moral rules, their consciousness was not the consciousness of a unique individual, but of a person with a pre-determined destiny. With the modern era, the relocation from the countryside to the city, the passage from stability and fixation to change and fluidity, from feudalism and farming to capitalism, trade production and business with labour force, a person gained a new form: he became an unique, conscious, responsible, automatized, discrete, bounded, coherent, choosing, and active individual, with a personal consciousness and a personal conscience. This person is a subject of freedom and responsibility at the same time.” (Rose, 1997:138) and such stance can have a severe impact on person's mental health.

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